

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13

ACDA-07 /077 W

----- 117052

R 260950Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 459

INFO ACCONSUL CALCUTTA 3555

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 2133

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, BG, IN

SUBJECT: INDO-BANGLADESH BORDER INCIDENTS

REF: A. NEW DELHI 5893; B. DACCA 2031; C. DACCA 2067

1. WE SHARE AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI'S SENSE OF UNCERTAINTY SURROUNDING THE RECENT EVENTS ON THE INDO-BANGLADESH BORDER (REF A). FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT, THE MOST IMMEDIATELY SALIENT POINT IS NOT THE FACT OF THE CLASHES -- THEY HAVE GONE ON INTERMITTENTLY FOR MONTHS, WENHAVE BEEN TOLD REPEATEDLY -- BUT RATHER THE PROMINENCE GIVEN TO THESE NEW CLASHES AND THE PUBLICITY GIVEN TO THE EXCHANGE OF STRONGLY WORDED PROTEST NOTES.

2. LOOKING SOLELY AT THE EVENTS ARISING OUT OF THE INCIDENTS, WE TEND TO SEE THE BANGLADESHI PROTEST NOTE AND PRESS STATEMENT ABOUT THE APRIL 20 INCIDENT AS REACTIVE, CONCLUDING THAT THE BDG FELT IT HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO RESPOND TO THE INDIAN PROTEST ABOUT THE APRIL 19 INCIDENT WITH ITS OWN SET OF CHARGES. (IT IS CONFIDENTIAL

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PERHAPS NOTEWORTHY THAT SINCE THE PUBLICATION OF ITS

PRESS NOTE ON APRIL 21, THE BDG HAS ONCE MORE LAPSED INTO SILENCE.)

3. WE HAVE TRIED TO CONSIDER THE BRIEF, IF SHARP EXCHANGE OF CHARGES AND COUNTER-CHARGES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE TOTALITY OF INDO-BANGLADESHI RELATIONS. GIVEN WHAT WE READ AS PROGRESS ON THE FARAKKA BARRAGE ISSUE (REF B), THE OUTBURST REGARDING THE BORDER HAS A VERY JARRING QUALITY. BECAUSE OF ITS DECISION TO ACCEPT THE VISIT OF THE INDIAN TECHNICAL TEAM BEFORE THAT OF A GOODWILL MISSION TO DISCUSS THE WHOLE RANGE OF ISSUES IN INDO-BANGLADESHI RELATIONS, WE WONDER IF THE BDG FELT IT NECESSARY TO RIPOSTE AS VIGOROUSLY AS IT DID ON THE BORDER ISSUE IN ORDER TO AVOID ADDING TO ANY DOMESTIC REPERCUSSION TO ITS CONCESSIONS ON FARAKKA.

4. FROM HERE WE CANNOT SPECULATE ON WHY THE INDIANS CHOSE TO MAKE THE INITIAL PROTEST. THE MFA IN DACCA, NOT UNNATURALLY, HAS ADDUCED THAT GHE GOI PROTESTED IN ORDER TO BREAK OFF WORK ON THE JOINT ENQUIRY TEAM REPORT WHICH THE BANGLADESHIS CLAIM PUTS INDIA IN A BAD LIGHT (SEE REF B). ACCORDING TO A DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUE, GENERAL DASTGIR, DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE BDR, IS HIGHLY EXERCISED ABOUT THE INDIAN FAILURE TO SIGN THE REPORT AND SUCH IRRITATION MAY HELP EXPLAIN BDG'S READINESS TO LEVEL A PUBLIC ATTACK AT THE INDIANS. ON THE INCIDENT ITSELF, DASTGIR NOTED THAT IT HAD BEEN A MORE SERIOUS CLASH THAN USUAL, ALTHOUGH NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT ONE TO HAVE OCCURRED SINCE NOVEMBER.

5. DASTGIR'S SENTIMENTS WERE MIRRORED BY BRIGADIER M. A. MANZUR, CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF, IN A CHANCE CONVERSATION WE HELD WITH HIM TODAY. STRESSING THAT BORDER INCIDENTS HAD BECOME A COMMONPLACE BUT ADDING THAT THE BDG HAD DELIBERATELY DOWNPLAYED THEM SINCE POPULAR FEELING IN BANGLADESH HAS BEEN RUNNING SO HIGH OVER THE FARAKKA ISSUE, MANZUR SAID THAT THE APRIL 21 INCIDENT WAS OF PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE AND HAD TO BE PROTESTED. THE COGS SAID THAT THE SIGNIFICANCE LAY IN THE FACT THAT

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SHELLS WERE FIRED AT BANGLADESH RIFLES (BDR) POSITIONS -- A FACT WHICH DEMONSTRATED THAT THE INDIAN BORDER SECURITY FORCE (BSF), AND NOT "MISCREANTS", HCD TO HAVE HAD A HAND IN THE INCIDENT -- AND THAT BSF CHIEF ASWINI KUMAR WAS IN THE VICINITY -- A FACT WHICH WOULD MAKE THE BSF'S ACTION EVEN MORE IMPORTANT. MANZUR SAID THAT IN HIS VIEW THE INDIAN NOTE DESCRIBING AN APRIL 19 INCIDENT WAS SIMPLY "PRE-EMPTIVE". MANZUR SAID THAT THE

BORDER IS NOW "RELATIVELY QUIET".

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: BORDER INCIDENTS, COMBAT OPERATIONS, DIPLOMATIC PROTESTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 26 APR 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: saccheem
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976DACCA02133
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760157-0853
From: DACCA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760423/aaaaathc.tel
Line Count: 117
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 NEW DELHI 5893, 76 DACCA 2031, 76 DACCA 2067
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: saccheem
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <14 JUN 2004 by SmithRJ>; APPROVED <30 SEP 2004 by saccheem>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INDO-BANGLADESH BORDER INCIDENTS
TAGS: PFOR, BG, IN
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006